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TAGS: PREL PGOV PINS PINR IZ

SUBJECT: KRG-TURKEY DIALOGUE STIRRING DESPITE TURKISH ATTACKS

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) We appear to be getting closer to direct contacts between Turkish officials and the KRG. We need to do everything possible to move the Turks and Iraqis along the political track as the improving weather heightens the temptation for both PKK and Turkey to launch cross-border operations. In the meantime, the Ambassador and visiting S/I David Satterfield have raised the importance of the KRG maintaining measures to curtail KGK freedom of movement with all of the top KRG leadership, and Turkish attacks continue to rankle the Kurds and affect the recent political comity in Baghdad. Each attack -- whether by air or land, and in spite of Turkey's genuine efforts to avoid civilian targets and infrastructure -- angers the KRG at the highest levels.

¶2. (S) Ambassador and visiting S/I David Satterfield on April 25 briefed Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Massoud Barzani and Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani on the state of play on setting up channels of dialogue between Turkey and Iraq. Nechirvan (and Deputy Prime Minister Barham Saleh, who Satterfield saw the same day) were pleased that the GOT plans to designate a Deputy PM as Barham's counterpart on the Higher Committee agreed to by Talabani and Gul. Satterfield described our concept of the US-Turkey-Iraq trilateral mechanism; the Barzanis were optimistic this would be more productive than the last trilateral foray. Word of a fresh round of Turkish air strikes arrived during the meeting with the Barzanis; Nechirvan was unconcerned but Massoud commented that kinetic action was the real message from the Turks to the Kurds, not public statements about dialogue.

¶3. (S) We continue to push the KRG to maintain or tighten the measures they promised in November against the PKK. Both Barzanis said they understand they are bound to their pledges to constrain PKK movement and supply lines. We are unlikely, however, to see either overly zealous implementation or significant impact on the PKK absent progress on the diplomatic track which shows them they are getting something in return.

¶4. (S) Right now it is most important that we get talks going in earnest between Ankara and the KRG, and between Ankara and the GOI. We should continue to urge both the KRG and GOT to get this dialogue off the ground and worry less about particular venues or interlocutors. We judge that neither GOT military actions nor KRG containment measures are making -- or can make -- any lasting difference on the PKK problem. A serious dialogue, however, could change the dynamic and prevent further provocative military operations from splitting the Kurds from the rest of the body politic.
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